



Bringing Business to Main Street

A Primer on Building a Better Downtown

Utah Pioneer Communities/Main Street Program

Why Focus on Downtown?

Traditionally, downtown has been the heart of the community. It has been the symbol of local history, as well as the “commons,” the site for parades, celebrations, and other community events.

But downtown is also important economically. It’s the indicator of a community’s economic health. It’s a significant source of property tax and other public revenues. It’s the “incubator” of new businesses and the home of independent, locally owned businesses that collectively are a major employer in the community. And downtown offers a mix of goods and services—retail, entertainment, government, and professional—that isn’t found anywhere else.

More specifically, building a better downtown is important for the following reasons:

- **To realize its economic potential.** An economically healthy downtown stabilizes a community’s economy, serving as a center for local businesses that provide jobs and incomes to residents while contributing increased property and sales taxes to local government.
- **To sustain important historic architecture.** Downtown contains a community’s stock of historic commercial architecture. It is critical to sustain this architecture as a defining element of community character. At the same time, downtown’s historic buildings also serve as important commercial space. Rehabilitating them to their original condition enhances their value and marketability.
- **To reduce sprawl.** Building a better downtown concentrates commercial development and growth in the community’s existing commercial center. It focuses community resources on local businesses, rather than on national chains. And it sustains community character by restoring its historic architecture, rather than allowing bland, standardized design to define community identity.
- **To restore community identity.** Communities that have re-focused their energy and resources on downtown have witnessed a resurgent sense of community identity. In many cases, a downtown revitalization effort establishes the foundation for addressing broader issues, such as education, crime, and growth management.

What is the Main Street Program?

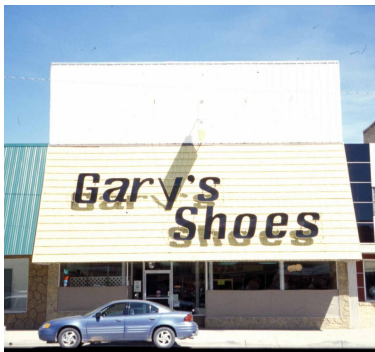
Utah Main Street is a program of the Utah Department of Community and Economic Development that provides training, technical assistance, and funding to communities that want to transform their downtowns into healthy, vibrant commercial centers. Utah Main Street is based on the “Main Street Approach,” a model for downtown development that has been applied successfully in over 1,000 communities across the country. The Main Street Approach is a comprehensive strategy that addresses the following elements:

- **Restoring the downtown landscape.** Restoring the downtown landscape is accomplished through a process called *design*. It focuses on bringing back Main Street’s historic character and pedestrian environment, but it covers a broad range of aesthetic and functional issues, such as building rehabilitation, landscaping, and parking. The ultimate goal of design is to use physical improvements as the basis for enhancing downtown’s marketability as a viable commercial center.
- **Promoting Main Street in a changing marketplace.** The retail marketplace is changing constantly. Customers now have a plethora of choices—not only what to buy but where and how to buy it. This intensely competitive environment demands an overall strategy for aggressively marketing Main Street through a process called *promotion*, through which the benefits of doing business downtown are communicated to downtown’s target markets.
- **Creating and maintaining an environment for business growth.** The process of building Main Street’s economic vitality is called *business growth*. It is directed at creating and sustaining a supportive environment for downtown businesses and property owners through an integrated strategy of business assistance, business recruitment, and property enhancement.
- **Managing and sustaining the revitalization effort.** To be truly effective, a community’s downtown development effort has to incorporate ongoing management and oversight that ensures that it is comprehensive and broad-based. The process of creating and sustaining this capability is called *organization*. Because it depends on building productive political, personal, and financial relationships, organization is the most challenging and complex element of downtown revitalization. But it is also the most important, because it integrates design, promotion, and economic restructuring in a framework for sustainable change.

Restoring the Downtown Landscape (Design)

Downtown is a complex place made up of many different components: buildings, trees, signs, lights, sidewalks, parking, et al. Improving the appearance and function of these components is fundamental to building a better downtown.

Restoring the downtown landscape usually begins with downtown's buildings, because, collectively, they are the defining feature of downtown. Improving downtown's buildings means restoring their historic character through a process called "rehabilitation." Rehabilitation not only improves a building's appearance but also increases its value by enhancing its marketability as commercial space. More generally, improving the appearance of downtown's buildings reinforces downtown's distinctive character, enhancing its appeal to local customers and visitors.



Downtown's public space—the "streetscape"—is important, as well. A well-maintained streetscape is a critical to attracting customers, because it establishes a perception about the quality of goods, services, and treatment that potential customers can expect to find. A clean, attractive streetscape can be inviting for customers, clients, and visitors. An unkempt one can discourage or even scare people away. While they have an aesthetic impact, streetscape amenities (e.g., benches, lighting, sidewalks) are primarily functional; they serve to make it easier and more comfortable for people to walk around downtown.

Restoring downtown's landscape is obviously an important goal of building a better downtown. But it's only one piece of the puzzle. Even if downtown communicates a distinctive, appealing identity, attracting and keeping customers still requires a targeted marketing strategy. And whether downtown's buildings are rehabilitated and maintained depends on whether they're occupied by stable, successful businesses.



Capitalizing on New Opportunities (Business Growth)

Even in small communities, downtown's economy is affected by a diversity of economic factors—local, regional, even international. The goal of strengthening downtown's economy is to create and sustain an environment that is supportive to local businesses, so that they can capitalize on economic changes.

This process starts with strengthening existing businesses by educating them about opportunities that may exist and pointing them to potential changes that may affect them. The longer-term objective is to help new businesses capitalize on new opportunities. The economic health of downtown will improve as existing businesses learn to better meet customer needs and adapt to changes in the marketplace. New businesses that move in will reinforce the business mix by offering complementary goods and services that appeal to downtown's target markets.

RETAIL MARKET ANALYSIS HELPER, UTAH			
PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGY			
<p>The purpose of the retail market analysis is to identify opportunities for economic development by estimating the "sales leakage" out of Helper and Carbon County – that is, how much money is being spent elsewhere that could be spent in downtown Helper and then assessing the buying power of Carbon County to estimate what percentage of these lost sales could be redirected to downtown. This analysis uses data from the Utah State Tax Commission to first identify the specific goods and services residents buy locally, as well as those goods and services for which they feel a need to travel outside of the local area. State Tax Commission data is then used to estimate the buying power of the community. By combining this analysis with community preferences gathered through surveys, we can estimate "capture rates" for redirecting some of these lost sales back to downtown Helper.</p> <p>For purposes of analysis, retail trade categories are grouped by standard industrial classification ("SIC") codes. There are two levels of industries: major industries ("General Sales Category") and minor industries ("Specific Sales Category"). The broader categories include the more specific breakdowns, as shown in the table below:</p>			
GENERAL SALES CATEGORY	SPECIFIC SALES CATEGORY	GENERAL SALES CATEGORY	SPECIFIC SALES CATEGORY
Building & Garden	Lumber and other building materials	Motor Vehicles	New and used car dealers
	Paint, glass and wallpaper		Auto supply
	Hardware stores		Gasoline service stations
	Nurseries and garden stores		Boat, motorcycle, recreation vehicle dealers
	Mobile home dealers	Furniture	Furniture

Building downtown's economy also focuses on increasing the value of downtown real estate by finding new or better uses for underused or vacant buildings. Changes in the marketplace require different ways of thinking about how buildings are utilized. A historic home in downtown can now house a day spa. Vacant space on the second floor can serve as residential or office space. Buildings historically used as retail space can be transformed into high-tech office space.

Cultivating a healthy business environment is obviously an important goal of building a better downtown. But a community's ability to be successful at capitalizing on new opportunities depends on its ability to address other elements of downtown development. For example, the success of downtown businesses will depend to a great extent on downtown's physical appearance—specifically, on the appearance of the buildings and the streetscape. Business success will also depend on a sound marketing strategy that communicates a clear, positive message to downtown's target markets about the value of doing business downtown.



Promoting Main Street In a Changing Marketplace (Promotion)

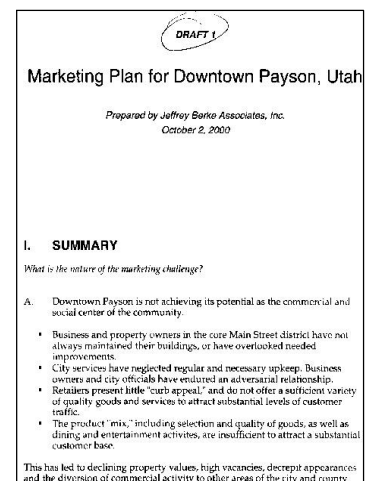
While a number of factors have affected downtown's economic health, none have had as direct an influence as the changes in the retail marketplace. Traditional promotional activities have lost their effectiveness. In the current marketplace, promoting downtown is about knowing who downtown's "target" customers are and finding the most effective way to communicate with them about the benefits of doing business downtown. By doing so, downtown business owners can establish strong relationships—keeping existing customers and attracting new ones—making downtown's economy more stable and downtown's businesses more profitable.



Effectively promoting downtown means clearly identifying specific "target markets" for downtown and putting together a cohesive marketing strategy for communicating with these "targeted" groups of customers. It requires a strategic approach to promotion that addresses changing demographics and lifestyles, as well as changes in downtown's business mix and physical attributes.

How a downtown chooses to promote itself will depend on a number of variables, but promotional activities may include advertising, public relations, or special events.

Promoting downtown is obviously an important goal of building a better downtown. But it cannot be effective without a positive physical image and a viable mix of businesses. The success of downtown's marketing efforts will depend to a great extent on the quality of the downtown "product." In other words, what does downtown present to target customers? For example, a successful promotional campaign will attract customers only if downtown businesses offer goods and services that meet their needs. And the appearance of the buildings and the streetscape will significantly affect people's perceptions of downtown.



Managing and Sustaining the Revitalization Effort (Organization)

Effective revitalization efforts are ones that integrate **design**, **promotion**, and **business growth**. More importantly, however, they bring together the diverse interests from throughout the community to manage and sustain the revitalization effort, because each brings different capabilities and resources to the table.

The process for achieving this collaboration is called **organization**. It is the most difficult and complex element of downtown revitalization, because it is about people—individuals who are subject to their own political and personal biases. The key to organization is to merge these individual agendas into a single, coherent plan of action for downtown. Organizational success is therefore about much more than simply generating and implementing a plan. It's about creating a structure through which positive, productive relationships can be nurtured and sustained.



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